



Dana E. Blackwell
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

COMMISSIONERS:
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DR. LA-DORIS MCCLANEY
SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW
DR. HARRIETTE WILLIAMS, CHAIR

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **March 15, 2004**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Joyce Fahey
Phalen G. Hurewitz
Daisy Ma
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry
Brenda Galloway
Helen Kleinberg
Christina S. Mattingly
Sandra Rudnick

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the March 15, 2004 meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes for the March 1, 2004 general meeting were unanimously approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Williams introduced and welcomed Nansi Buenrostro, new staff assistant in the Commission office.

- Chair Williams announced the passing of Youth Representative, Trinity Wallace-Ellis' sister.
- Chair Williams announced the upcoming Foster Care Awareness Week taking place May 9- 16, 2004.
- As a result of the Chair's meeting, Chair Williams reported that there was no change in the Commission's by-laws with respect to its annual election and retreat. The recognition of the Commission's 20th anniversary and the funding of the Commission's budget for FY 2004-05 were also discussed.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Dr. Sanders reminded the Commission of a previous report they were provided regarding detention rates at the Department by office. He indicated that the Department has identified seven outcome areas to be measured to determine how the Department is performing overall. Dr. Sanders suggested that a more complete presentation be given to the Commission at a future meeting.

The measures are consistent with the Department's overall goals to 1) reduce timelines to permanency; 2) decrease abuse in out of home care and 3) reduce the reliance on out of home care. The seven measures include: detention rates, rate of abuse in out of home care, multiple referrals, percentage of children who have been in one placement over the course of a year, number of placements children experience while in care, the length of time in care and the percentage of children in care longer than two years. These outcomes will be measured at an office by office level.

Vice Chair Biondi commented that allegations of abuse in relative care were not investigated in the past. She inquired whether that practice had changed. Dr. Sanders indicated that the outcomes that are currently being measured include relative homes.

Commissioner Fahey asked if the analysis will include child deaths in the home when there have been previous referrals to the Department. Dr. Sanders stated that the Department is looking to develop a cross report of multiple referrals with the critical incident and child fatality reports.

Commissioner Sorkin asked if the analysis will consider whether placements are within the child's community of origin and whether Structured Decision Making (SDM) reassessments will be considered. Dr. Sanders indicated that he considers SDM to be a strategy to reach these goals especially with respect to decreasing timelines to permanency. Dr. Sanders suggested that the consideration of placement location would be an important measure to consider.

WORKGROUP REPORT – Family Reunification

Commissioner Sorkin stated that family reunification is more likely to take place soon after the child is detained and provided statistics that characterized the rate of reunification over time. John Oppenheim, Deputy Director, stated that the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency (NRC) has provided literature which identifies practices that they believe to be key building blocks to develop a sound family

reunification system. These practices include: placement decision-making; parent-child visitation; intensive services; resource parent/birth parent collaboration; and aftercare services. He indicated that more research needs to take place to determine which of these practices contributes most significantly to sustained reunification. Commissioners were provided a detailed description of each of these practices which Russ Carr, Deputy Director, reviewed during the presentation.

Mr. Oppenheim commented that the standards to return a child to their home are often times higher than the reason the child was initially detained. He believes that the use of SDM can better ensure that CSWs are focusing on safety as the standard by which children are returned home. Additionally, the utilization of concurrent planning should be communicated to parents while they are being provided services toward reunification. He indicated that these practices provide a solid framework from which the family reunification workgroup can begin to develop a comprehensive practice and strategic plan for both accelerated and increased reunification rates in Los Angeles County.

Commissioner Sorkin spoke with respect to the "Utah Plan" which has a 90 day timeframe for reunification, she asked whether there was the thought of implementing such a plan. Mr. Oppenheim indicated that there needs to be some review of the practices of CSWs with respect to court timeframes. Commissioner Fahey provided a timeline of court hearings as it relates to the disposition of the case and the many opportunities for case review. She suggested that the communication between the family and a particular CSW during the initial phases of the case is significantly increased as those opportunities for case review are often lost. She further suggested that a CSW be assigned to the case immediately when detention takes place rather than at the disposition hearing which usually takes place six months after detention. Dr. Sanders indicated that implementing Point of Engagement is partly an attempt to address this issue as the CSW will be assigned at the beginning of the case opening.

Commissioner Sorkin asked how after care services could be effectively bolstered to prevent the likelihood of reabuse with families that have been reunified. Mr. Carr indicated that families need to be effectively connected to community based resources that can provide the services needed by individual families to promote safety with the home setting. Commissioner Sorkin asked if any of the funds from family support can be utilized to assist in improving the success of safe family reunification and after care services. Mr. Carr responded in the affirmative. Mr. Oppenheim suggested that the funding flexibility that is provided from the IVE Waiver will allow the Department to invest funds in the development of services to support family reunification through the provision of after care services.

Commissioner Hurewitz suggested that depending upon the reason for the detention of the child, the strategies and services that are provided to families will vary. Commissioner Hurewitz asked for further detail about resource families with respect to their role. Mr. Oppenheim explained that resource families are those who are willing to change their status from foster to either adoptive or legal guardian if family reunification is not possible.

Vice Chair Ma asked for further explanation of the Contra Costa model in which a birth parent and child move into the home of a resource family for mentoring. Mr. Oppenheim indicated that the use of such a family is generally geared toward parents with drug and alcohol challenges. After in-patient rehabilitation services are concluded, the birth parent lives with the resource family with and with the child to receive assistance developing their parenting skills. He indicated that there were challenges with the funding, but it is possible to overcome and it is a successful model. He suggested that it could be adapted for relative caregivers. Commissioner Fahey indicated that this model does exist in Los Angeles County, particularly with young mothers.

Chair Williams suggested the use of Family Preservation funds for relative providers.

Commissioner Sorkin suggested that training is implemented for CSWs to understand the dynamics associated with family visitation and the trauma children and families re-experience each time a visit comes to an end. Mr. Oppenheim indicated that a family centered practice training curriculum has been developed for CSWs, supervisors and managers to ensure that families are truly engaged in the planning process.

Zena Oglesby, Institute for Black Parenting, suggested that the Universities are not adequately preparing social workers. He believes that the county could be a strong advocate for more effective training especially with respect to intake procedures, dependency procedures and therapeutic training for child welfare issues.

Chair Williams acknowledged and complimented the Family Reunification workgroup for their efforts thus far. She reminded the Commission of the pending date for a final report on each of the workgroups efforts and recommendations. Commissioner Hurewitz asked Dr. Sanders how the Katie A. settlement converges with the many Departmental initiatives going on at this time. Dr. Sanders recognized the overlapping themes in all initiatives, including the Katie A. settlement, and suggested that the Commission be provided the opportunity to assist the Department in making sure that the resulting plans amalgamate effectively. He further indicated that the judge overseeing the settlement is looking for a set of measures that will be used to determine progress on the settlement agreement. The next hearing will take place in May. Vice Chair Biondi shared that during a recent meeting with members from the Katie A. panel it was emphasized that all efforts in the Department should be coordinated, including those of the settlement. She urged the Commissioners to read the panel's report that was provided to them. Chair Williams agreed that such a presentation should take place and indicated that she would work with Dr. Sanders with respect to the appropriate time.

OLD BUSINESS

DCFS Budget FY 2004-05: Joan Smith, Deputy Director, explained that since the most recent presentation on the Department's budget, a number of revisions have been made. Tito Barin, DCFS, stated that the budget submission reflects an increase of \$21.8 million in gross appropriations (administrative and assistance payments) and a net County cost (NCC) increase of \$13.0 million. Additionally there is an elimination of 446 budgeted

positions. The elimination of these positions is necessary to cover the Department's unavoidable cost increases in fixed and variable employee benefits. With respect to the assistance payments portion of the budget, Mr. Barin indicated that these increase are in the area of KinGap at \$4.3 million and in the Adoption Assistance Program at \$27.2 million. These increases offset the decrease of \$14.2 million in Foster Care.

Ms. Smith stated that the major changes that the Department is facing in their budget are in the administrative portion of the budget. She indicated that the assistance portion of the budget is based upon an assumption of what will happen during the current fiscal year and staying at that level in FY 04-05. This she believes is possible due to the overall goals the Director has set out for the Department. She further indicated that the IVE Waiver will allow the Department to manage the budget as one unit rather than two separate budgetary units. Ms. Smith further explained that the positions that are being eliminated are budgeted administrative positions which are currently vacant. She stated that there would be no elimination of social work positions.

Vice Chair Biondi asked for clarification as to the increase of \$5 million to utilize group homes due to the closure of MacLaren Children's Center (MCC). Ms. Smith indicated that a portion of the funds allocated to the operation of MCC was added to the administrative budget to develop supports for MCC youth. The remainder of the funds were put into a "provisional financing uses fund". There was no increase allocated to the assistance budget to recognize that those children who would have been placed at MCC may now be in out of home care. There was no analysis to determine whether it cost more or less to have children in group homes with supporting services versus the cost to place them in MCC. With respect to the increase of the Probation assistance costs and corresponding NCC corresponds to the out of home placement costs for this population. These costs come through the Department's budget and not all of these children (1,500 per month) are IVE eligible which attributes to the increase of NCC. Vice Chair Biondi expressed the potential need to develop community placements for probation youth needing mental health services due to the possible closure of the probation camps. This could potentially increase their eligibility of IVE funding.

Commissioner Hurewitz asked if the Department is developing the budget based on assumptions about the number of children expected to receive services and if the budget reflects the assumption that the IVE Waiver will be implemented in October 2004. Ms. Smith said that the overall foster care case load is decreasing and the Department expects that to continue as a trend. This is projected on the last eight months of detention. Ms. Smith said that this budget is not based upon the approval of the Waiver.

Commissioner Sorkin stated that NCC funds were earmarked for the MCC population. She indicated that some of the funds were to be allocated to the Paramount Family Conferencing Center. She inquired about the status of those funds. Ms. Smith indicated that information was provided to the Commission on those funds through the end of December 2003. The Department continues to further refine the identification of expenditures for this population. They have thus far identified ten to 12 services that are being utilized. Another update will be provided to the Commission. Commissioner

Sorkin's concern is based upon the intake criteria for the Paramount Center. Chair Williams asked if further discussion of the Paramount Center could be held. She indicated that because the presentation on the Center was not complete it will be agendaized for further discussion at a future Commission meeting. A date will be offered to Commissioners to visit the site prior revisiting the discussion.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no request for public comment.

MEETING ADJOURNED